DAVID A. DONOVAN RETIREMENT EVENT

February 24, 1998
Remarks by John M. Buchanan

David, you and I know a secret...namely that this is the greatest job in the world. And we know how privileged we are to be able to be ministers here, in this place, with these people. We know that the opportunity to do what you believe God calls you to do: to do work you believe God wants done in the world – and to be paid for it – is a rare and wonderful blessing.

As I thought about what I might add to this occasion, I turned to the Book of Order – the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) which you have served all your life – a document you know and understand far better than most of us because of your term as Stated Clerk of the Presbytery of Chicago.

I turned to the section that talks about ministry and this is the first thing it says:

> "All ministry in the Church is a gift from Jesus Christ. Members and officers alike serve virtually under the mandate of Christ who is the chief minister of all. His ministry is the basis of all ministries: the standard for all officers is the pattern of the one who came not to be served, but to serve." G-6.0101

And then a little later the Book of Order talks about the gifts and requirements for ministry:

> "God gives suitable gifts for these various duties: those who undertake particular ministries should be persons of strong faith, dedicated discipleship and love of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Their manner of life should be a demonstration of the Christian gospel in the church and in the world. They must have the approval of God's people." G-6.0106

As I read that I smiled because I don't know anyone who has fulfilled those expectations more thoroughly than David Donovan. He has been and is thoroughly and completely a Presbyterian minister.

At the center of his very being as a minister is the model of servanthood the Book of Order invokes as the first thing it says about ministers: "The standard is the one who came not to be served but to serve."

That has been David's gift to the churches he has served and to each one of us and we know that when we experience it: when you know you are with someone willing to lay aside his agenda, his hopes and desires, his schedule, his time – in order to attend to your needs – you have been given a gift from God.

Sometimes we call it "having a pastor's heart." David has it and we have all been blessed beyond measure.

It has been my great privilege for 13 years to work with David on a daily basis.

He was my communications link with Fourth Church in the days after my election as pastor and moving here – a very critical time. David introduced me to Fourth Presbyterian Church and Chicago and was helpful in so many ways. He has been dependable, reliable and those are important gifts in our profession. He took on whatever jobs needed doing and did them with faithfulness and distinction.

And when a crisis erupted – an emergency hospitalization, an unexpected death, a domestic crisis, a sick baby – it was David to whom we all turned, including myself.

When an officer of Fourth Presbyterian Church died unexpectedly on a Caribbean cruise and his wife was too sick and confused to cope with the situation and there were no relatives, it was David and Mary Denny who flew to Florida to take care of everything and escort the frantic widow back to Chicago.

Along with many of you – when my mother died and when my grandchildren were born, I headed to Dave Donovan's office to sit and talk for a while.

I also went there because he became my friend and he and Katy and Sue and I have enjoyed the blessing of honest and whole friendship across dinner tables – talking about our children and grandchildren.

And to Katy Donovan we owe a great debt of gratitude as well. I have a theory that the best kind of minister's spouse – from the church's perspective, is one who doesn't particularly want to be a minister's spouse, has her/his own life and agenda and simply loves this man/this woman who happens to be a clergy person. Obviously, it helps if the spouse is not a pagan, but a committed Christian as well. Katy is such an important part of who David is that it's almost impossible to talk about him apart from her energy and love and laughter and caring.

A secret about Katy – is that she, not Dave, not me – is the number one Cubs fan around here. And when it came time to divide up the season tickets we buy together, Dave sent Katy to do the negotiating and trading because suddenly—looking at a table full of Cubs tickets – she was transformed – a gleam in her eye, back stiffened, eyes narrowed – a formidable force.

David upheld high professional standards as well. I talked to a promising young minister recently who asked, "Do you have to wear a necktie to work at Fourth Church?" I knew that the interview was over.

I love David's polished shoes and professional attire – because that too reflects his commitment to the profession of ministry.

So – enough – we will miss his daily presence. I will.

But I'm delighted that he and Katy will be a part of the community of faith and that the gifts of caring and friendship will continue to be shared.

One final thought. You don't do this job for 19 years with continuing energy, intelligence, imagination and love – unless there is something deep in your heart to which you said "yes" once and then said "yes" again and again, every day of your life.

I love something Henry David Thoreau wrote in his diary. I often cite it at the time of ordination and installation and it seemed particularly appropriate tonight – for David.

> "All that a man has to say or to do that can possibly concern mankind is in some shape or another to tell the story of his love – to sing, and if he is fortunate and keeps alive, he will forever be in love."

David – a man in love – with Katy and his family, with church and his ministry -- in love with God....

Thank you, David.

There is a prayer for the time of a minister's retirement in our Book of Common Worship:

> God of grace, we thank you for the gifts of Christian ministry given in your servant, David. We celebrate the years of his labor in the fields of the Lord, and rejoice in the blessings so many have received. Give your servant a sense of fulfillment and completion, a time of refreshment and rest, and new opportunities for living the good news of your love in Jesus Christ. Amen.